

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUND NO. 5-5649
CHARLES WEISS/JERUSALEM

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ISRAEL POLITICAL SCENE

ANNCR:

ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER MENAHEM BEGIN HAS JUST CONCLUDED TALKS WITH PRESIDENT CARTER IN WASHINGTON WHICH THE ISRAELI LEADER DESCRIBED AS DIFFICULT. VOA'S CHARLES WEISS HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT ON SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES MISTER BEGIN IS HAVING AT HOME.

VOICE:

WHEN MENAHEM BEGIN ASSUMED OFFICE LAST SUMMER -- AFTER A CAREER IN OPPOSITION THAT BEGAN WHEN THE STATE OF ISRAEL WAS ESTABLISHED -- HE JOINED A TEAM WHICH, ALTHOUGH INEXPERIENCED MADE A DETERMINED SHOW OF UNQUESTIONING LOYALTY TO THE PRIME MINISTER HIMSELF. THIS WINTER, HOWEVER, THERE HAVE BEEN RUMBLINGS WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY, THE LIKUD.

THE MOST NOTABLE WAS THE THREAT -- IMPLIED OR REAL -- BY DEFENSE MINISTER EZER WEIZMAN TO RESIGN IF HIS ORDERS ON FREEZING JEWISH SETTLEMENTS IN OCCUPIED AREAS WERE COUNTERMANDED. MR. WEIZMAN, WHO WAS IN THE UNITED STATES AT THE TIME, HEARD THAT THE INSTRUCTIONS HE HAD LEFT BEHIND TO CURTAIL NEW SETTLEMENTS WERE BEING BROUGHT UP FOR REVIEW. HE IMMEDIATELY CALLED JERUSALEM AND SAID HE'D CUT SHORT HIS TALKS WITH THE PENTAGON AND RETURN HOME IF ANYTHING OF THIS SORT HAPPENED. MISTER BEGIN REASSURED HIM, AND THE AFFAIR BLEW OVER.

AMONG MR. BEGIN'S CURRENT DIFFICULTIES IS THE CHOICE OF ISRAEL'S NEXT PRESIDENT. THE INCUMBENT, EPHRAIM KATZIR, IS QUITTING AT THE END OF THIS FIVE-YEAR TERM, AND THE PRIME MINISTER HAS PROCLAIMED THAT HIS SUCCESSOR MUST BE A

SEPHARDIC JEW -- THAT IS, A JEW WHO TRACES HIS ANCESTRY BACK TO THE ORIENTAL COUNTRIES RATHER THAN TO EUROPE. THE JEWS WHO CAME FROM EUROPE, OR ASHKENAZIM, HAVE STAFFED THE ESTABLISHMENT TILL NOW. BUT MR. BEGIN WENT AHEAD AND PICKED AN EGYPTIAN-BORN PHYSICIST EMPLOYED AT THE NUCLEAR REACTOR NEAR TEL AVIV, YITZHAK CHAVEH. THOUGH THE POST OF PRESIDENT CARRIES NO REAL AUTHORITY, THE CHOICE OF MR. CHAVEH HAS AROUSED SOME GRUMBLING. THE LIBERAL PARTY, WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR A THIRD OF MISTER BEGIN'S LIKUD, DID MORE THAN JUST GRUMBLE. IT ADVANCED ITS OWN CANDIDATE, A PARTY WARHORSE NAMED ELIMELECH RIMALT.

SINCE THE LIKUD IS FORMALLY ONLY A PARLIAMENTARY BLOCK AND NOT REALLY A PARTY WHICH CAN ENFORCE DISCIPLINE ON ITS MEMBERS, THIS WAS PERFECTLY LEGITIMATE. THE ONLY TROUBLE IS THAT MISTER RIMALT STANDS A VERY GOOD CHANCE OF WINNING A MAJORITY IN THE KNESSET, ISRAEL'S PARLIAMENT, WHEN THE ELECTION COMES TO A VOTE NEXT MONTH. THE SETBACK FOR MISTER BEGIN IS NOT ON A MATTER OF SUBSTANCE, OF COURSE, BUT HIS PERSONAL PRESTIGE HAS TAKEN A BEATING.

AT THE END OF OCTOBER, THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT LAUNCHED WHAT IT CALLED A NEW ECONOMIC POLICY. IT WAS BASED PRINCIPALLY ON LIBERALIZING THE RIGID CURRENCY AND IMPORT CONTROLS BUILT UP IN TWENTY-NINE YEARS OF LABOR-ALIGNMENT RULE AND AIMED AT CREATING A WELFARE STATE. THE NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATION, HISTADRUT, NATURALLY DENOUNCED THE N.E.P. AS INIMICAL TO WORKER'S INTERESTS. BUT SURPRISINGLY, THE LIKUD FACTION, WHICH WON THIRTY PERCENT OF THE VOTE IN THE HISTADRUT ELECTIONS IN JUNE, WENT ALONG WITH THE LABOR ALIGNMENT MAJORITY IN CONDEMNING WHAT THE LIKUD GOVERNMENT WAS DOING.